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ABSTRACT

This brief survey of the conceptual development of the morale-productivity relationship examines some of the major representative studies of this subject from the 1930s through the 1970s. The author notes the trend away from thinking of productivity and morale as simply and directly related, the traditional view assumed in the early research. He states that although high morale does not ensure high productivity, research indicates that certain situational and environmental factors, as well as motivational determinants that result in greater worker effectiveness and productivity, may generate high morale and job satisfaction. The author believes that there is ample need for further research in the area of morale and job satisfaction. (Author/DS)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Relationship of Morale & Productivity:
An Historical Overview

An analysis of the historical development dealing with the major representative studies involving the morale-productivity relationship is offered the reader.

The relationship appears to have evolved from a viewpoint of direct simple correlation between morale and productivity to a present day view of examining a multi-dimensional spectrum involving situations, environmental factors, motivation, and job levels, to name a few.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The purpose of this article is to provide an historical overview of the morale-productivity relationship. Because of space limitations, it is not possible to review all of the studies done in this area; however, an attempt is made to present the important and representative studies.

The relationship between productivity and morale appears to be somewhat nebulous. There are many definitions of morale and this fact in itself has added to the confusion of studies related to morale and productivity. Some of these definitions of morale are as follows:

> ... the sum of satisfactions which the individual experiences because of his membership and involvement in an organization. (14:8)
>
> ... the feeling of well-being experienced by an individual when his needs are being filled to his satisfaction. (9:1)
>
> ... the attitudes of individuals and groups towards their work environment and toward voluntary cooperation to the full extent of their ability in the best interests of the group. (4:58)

Although various definitions of morale are given in the literature, the general feeling seems to be that morale consists of a composite of factors. Morale can be viewed as a description of esprit de corps, enthusiasm, or zeal. Most definitions hint and relate to various satisfactions obtained from the job or work environment. Some of the factors comprising morale are: personality of the individual, job performance, ability, motivation working conditions, organizational structure, supervisor's leadership style, individual needs, etc. (29) Many definitions completely obviate

consideration of off-the-job activities which could well affect on-the-job morale. Inconsistent techniques for measuring morale have resulted from lack of agreement on a definition of morale. (26:293)

Frequently the terms "job attitudes" and "job satisfaction" are used interchangeably as reflecting the individual's affective orientations toward his job.(7) This is similar to the morale definition and adds to the confusion in measurement of morale. Guion defined morale as:

> The extent to which the individual's needs are satisfied and the extent to which the individual perceives that satisfaction as stemming from his total job situation.(10:59-64)

Davis stated that one of the difficulties in morale measurement is that it is confused with happiness and satisfaction, variables which comprise morale.(4:60) However, studies have shown in some cases workers can be happy because they are successful in fighting the organization.(29)

The definition of productivity is somewhat more agreed upon by experts in the field. Sutermeister defines productivity simply as "output per man hour, quality considered."(29:2) Productivity is usually measured on the basis of an input-output ratio for purposes of research.(26) Basically, the major difficulty in most efforts to relate morale and productivity has been one of inconsistent and inexact definition of terms.

It was traditionally felt, until the late 1920's, that there was a direct correlation between morale and productivity. A modern emphasis for management was inaugurated by the studies conducted at the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago. Management became aware of the significance of such factors as morale, the social system, the Hawthorne effect, employee views and feelings, and other previously overlooked sources of human motivation.(31) The publicity given the findings of Elton Mayo and his associates eventually led to interest in measuring morale and relating it to productivity.(21) Many experiments soon began in an effort to determine whether a direct causal relationship existed between morale and productivity. The results led to the general belief that high morale was associated with high productivity.

Since the initial investigation in 1932 by Kornhouser and Sharp,(18) and Hoppock's Monograph on Job Satisfaction in 1935,(13) there have been numerous studies considering the relationship between morale and productivity. Most of the early studies, however, assumed that a positive relationship existed between morale and productivity. Very little attention was directed at trying to understand why job satisfaction should relate to job performance. Porter and Lawler asserted that the studies were limited primarily to analyzing relationships in a number of specific industrial settings.(23) A majority of literature during the 1930's and 1940's assumed that morale or job satisfaction was related to or affected job performance.

During the 1950's a generally negative reaction began to emerge toward the human relations movement, and its cause and effect relationship of the morale-productivity views which had been espoused up to that time. The reason for this reaction came from widely publicized studies on an insurance company in 1950[16] and on a railroad in 1951[17] which were released by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. Still, it was not until 1955 that a scientific review of the liturature was conducted. This extensive review by Brayfield and Crockett was between 1930 and 1954 and it concluded that there was little evidence of any simple or appreciable relationship between worker attitudes and job performance. The findings did, however, indicate positive relationships between job satisfaction and the variables of absenteeism and turnover.[2] The conclusions reached in the Brayfield and Crockett, as well as Herzberg in 1957, [12] shattered the earlier held views on the morale-productivity relationship and set the stage for more extensive empirical research which followed.

In many of the early studies prior to the 1950's, morale was considered one dimensional and was measured in terms of job satisfaction. Summers suggested that many of the inconsistent findings by researchers were caused by the diversity of morale measures. He asserted that if a researcher equated morale with job satisfaction, the relationship between morale and job performance or turnover is likely to be different, than if morale were equated with favorable attitudes toward the organization and organizational goals.[28]

Kahn used a multi-dimensional approach to job satisfaction and found no consistent correlation with productivity. He used the indexes of satisfaction with the company as a whole, satisfaction with financial and job status, and satisfaction with the job itself.(15)

Vroom, in his 1964 review of the literature, drew the following conclusions:

> 1. There is a consistent negative relationship between job satisfaction and the probability of resignation...
> 2. There is a less consistent negative relationship between job satisfaction and absences.
> 3. There is some indication of a negative relationship between job satisfaction and accidents.
> 4. There is no simple relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. Correlations between these variables vary within an extremely large range and the median correlation of .14 has little theoretical or practical importance. We do not yet know the conditions which affect the magnitude and direction of relationships between satisfaction and performance. Obtained correlations are similar for analyses based on individuals and groups and do not seem to depend, to any appreciable extent, on the occupational level of subjects or on the nature of the criterion (objective or ratings) employed.(30:186-187)

Porter and Lawler commented on the Vroom study as follows:

> The magnitude of the median relationship or association is obviously not large, as Vroom points out. However, the consistency of the direction of relationship in these twenty-three cases is quite impressive, since twenty of the correlations are positive! By a sign test, such consistency would occur by chance less than once in a hundred times (even using a conservative two-tailed test of significance). Thus, looked at in one way, the Vroom review of studies measuring the relationship between satisfaction and performance shows a very tenuous association between the two variables; looked at in another way, however, it leaves one with the impression that we are dealing with something other than a whimsical chance phenomenon.(25:123)

Many reasons have been cited for the lack of positive corelations between job satisfaction and job performance. In spite of the critics, each study has failed to answer why the same measures of satisfaction have been rather good at predicting turnover and absenteeism. Lee stated that both turnover and

absenteeism are forms of behaviour and represent a choice situation where motivation is a critical factor. An explanation of this discrepancy might be that turnover and absenteeism can usually be measured in a relatively objective manner, but job performance is frequently measured by supervisory ratings.(19)

Likert asserted that the relationship between job satisfaction and performance becomes more positive as the job level requires increased skills.(30) This is consistent with Drucker, who states that measurement of productivity can present a problem when dealing with the manual and non-manual worker.(6) Studies indicate that for the lower-level jobs in industry, those with a tendency to be repetitive and under close supervisory control, the morale construct has little effect upon productivity. However, there is a more direct relationship between morale and productivity for persons employed in supervisory, professional, technical, and executive positions.(1) This has been further evidenced in the field of education by Cooper,(3) who found a direct correlation between the job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness of junior college teachers.

Likert and Seashore, in their study, found differences in supervisory practices to be directly related to differences in morale and productivity. They found high productivity to be associated with the absence of a feeling of pressure for productivity. They asserted that a supervisory style which is "employee-oriented" rather than "production-oriented" is more effective for both morale and productivity. They further stated that the "employee-oriented" style should demonstrate concern for human satisfaction without sacrificing performance goals.(20:641-648)

Today there are at least six different types of morale-productivity relationships considered possible. Of the six

possibilities, two are consistent with the earlier traditional views--high morale linked with high productivity and low morale linked with low productivity.(26) A third possibility was cited by Goode and Fowler and is found when tremendous supervisory emphasis is associated with disregard for the workers' feelings. This condition presents a low morale and high productivity relationship.(8) A fourth possibility is the existence of no relationship, either direct or inverse, between morale and productivity. Katz and his associates found this situation possible in a study of office workers. The high and low morale sections showed no statistically significant difference in productivity when the type of work, working conditions, and personal aptitude are all held constant.(16) A fifth possibility was asserted by Davis in which the workers are kept happy at all costs by the supervisor. This situation leads to a high morale and low productivity relationship.(5) The sixth possibility is one in which improvement in one variable may cause an improvement in the other, and so on in a self-perpetuating cycle. This condition is described by Haire and Gottsdanker as a circular relationship between morale and productivity.(11)

A new and different intrepretation concerning the morale productivity relationship came about as a result of Brayfield and Crockett's article in 1955.(2) Their interpretation is closely tied in with the role of motivation in industry. It was generally assumed that the satisfied worker is always the productive worker. Research has shown this to be an oversimplified view. Satisfaction with one's work does not necessarily lead to high motivation and performance. Even though job satisfaction may often be associated with high performance, both variables are likely to be a part of a more complex set of relationships. Regarding this, Fleishman

made the following statement:

> ... in some cases it is possible that performance on the job is the cause of satisfaction rather than the effect of it. One of the difficulties here is the need to distinguish between satisfaction and motivation. Insofar as his needs are met, a person may be satisfied with his job. But his overall satisfaction does not necessarily indicate his motivation to work, particularly when his satisfaction does not depend on the effort he puts in his work.(7:270)

Brayfield and Crockett stated that the relation between job satisfaction and job performance is one of concomitant variation rather than cause and effect. Their theory became the path-goal approach to productivity. They assumed that workers were motivated to achieve certain environmental goals and that this achievement resulted in satisfaction. The path-goal approach sheds insight into how morale and performance can have a relationship despite being caused by different factors. For example, if rewards cause satisfaction and in some instances productivity provides rewards, then a relationship between morale and productivity can come about through the action of a third variable--rewards. If good performance leads to satisfaction, then morale can be said to be caused by job performance instead of causing performance.(27:130-137)

Another theory relating performance to intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, the worker's reward expectations, and satisfaction is offered by Porter and Lawler.(23) This approach is related to the needs theory and divides rewards into intrinsic sense of personal progress and accomplishment and extrinsic encouragement and praise provided by an outsider such as a supervisor. The theory is that intrinsic rewards are more effective in producing performance. This approach corresponds to the job type and supervisory style relationship mentioned earlier in connection with the morale-productivity relationship.

Summary and Conclusions

Even though the above overview does not exhaust the literature, one point is now clear. The morale/job satisfaction relationship to productivity, whether studied alone or together, are associated with a large number of covariates.(25:428) It can be seen that part of the problem is perhaps attributed to measurement problems, but also to the definitions of the terms morale and productivity.

It would seem, based on the empirical research, that the old traditional view of relating morale to high productivity has no validity. Studies have shown that many factors, such as job type and supervisory style, can affect the morale-productivity relationship. A more direct relationship has been found between morale and productivity amoung individuals employed in supervisory, technical, professional, and executive positions than in lower-level manual type jobs whcih exhibit less creativity and freedom of action.

Although high morale does not insure high productivity, research indicates that certain situations, environmental factors, and motivational determinants which result in greater worker effectiveness and productivity may generate high morale and job satisfaction. Since so much emphasis and concern is today directed toward organizational performance and morale, i.e. people are even fired because they "supposedly" contribute to "low morale," it would appear there is ample need for further research into the dimensionality of morale/job satisfaction and the special conditions in which relationships are found to exist.

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